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Getting Along in Bear Country



United States
Department of
Agriculture



Forest Service
Pacific Northwest
Region

Understanding Bears

Bears are individuals. One may be aggressive while another is tolerant. Generally they are solitary animals associating only with their offspring or mate. Bears gather where food is abundant, but even here they keep to themselves. They may be active in the early morning or late evening. When not foraging, they are usually resting in daybeds located next to downed logs, in dense brush or under the roots of fallen trees.

Bears are intelligent and curious animals. Though their eyesight is adequate, they generally rely on their extraordinary senses of hearing and smell to identify their surroundings.

From November to late March or April, bears sleep in their dens, but they can be easily awakened throughout the winter. In the spring, they move to lower elevations to feed on grasses and roots along streams. They also feed on carcasses of dead animals. They travel to higher elevations in the summer and feed in open areas. In the fall, berry fields are a prime feeding area.



Bears Are Wild Animals

Bears are wild animals and must be treated as such.

- No matter how tame they may seem, their responses are unpredictable.
- A female may charge if she feels you are a threat to her cubs.
- Bears need their space. If approached too closely or surprised, they may become aggressive.



Safety In Bear Country

As long as you are in bear country it is important to think safety. The following hints can help you minimize the danger for yourself and others.

- Hike with friends.
- Hike only during the day, not before dawn, during twilight or at night.
- Make noises so that bears are not taken by surprise. Tie bells to your backpack to alert bears of your presence.
- Be alert while picking berries in isolated mountain areas.
- Use extra caution where your hearing or visibility is limited, as in brushy areas, near streams, where the trail rounds a bend, or on windy days.
- Before making camp, search for bear droppings. This is a good indication that a bear inhabits the area.

If You Encounter A Bear



If you see a bear, stay calm and give it plenty of room. Do not startle it. Detour slowly keeping upwind so it will get your scent and know you are there. If you can't detour, wait until it moves away from your route before proceeding.

When a bear first detects you, it may stand upright and use all of its senses to determine what and where you are. Once it identifies you it may run, ignore you, move slowly away, or it may charge. A wild bear rarely attacks unless it feels threatened or provoked.

Should a bear advance aggressively, head for the nearest tall tree. **DON'T RUN!** Drop some sizeable item, your pack or bedroll, to distract the bear. This should give you time to retreat.

Most adult grizzlies cannot climb trees and black bears can often be discouraged from climbing.

If attacked by a bear, do not run. Bears can easily outrun you. Try playing dead. Lie flat on your stomach, or lie on your side with your legs drawn up to your chest. Clasp your hands over the back of your neck. Bears have passed by people in these positions without harming them.



Food and Odors Attract Bears



- Keep a clean camp. Pack out all garbage. While camping hang your garbage in a tree. Don't bury it.
- Store food in sealed odor proof containers or plastic bags and hang them out of reach of bears; at least 10 feet from the ground and outside your camping area. Use freeze-dried foods whenever possible. Never keep food in your tent!

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- Game meat should be hung out of reach, away from camping areas.
- Personal cleanliness is essential. Do not use perfumes, deodorants or other sweet smelling substances. Women should not hike or camp in bear country during their menstrual period.
- The odor of human sexual activity may attract bears.

Bears are common visitors to established campgrounds, often passing through at night. If no food is available, they will leave, but if you have carelessly left food or garbage around they will eat it and may damage your campsite in the process. Bears will return to campsites where they have found food in the past. If you encounter a bear at your campsite do not approach or chase it. You or someone else could get hurt.



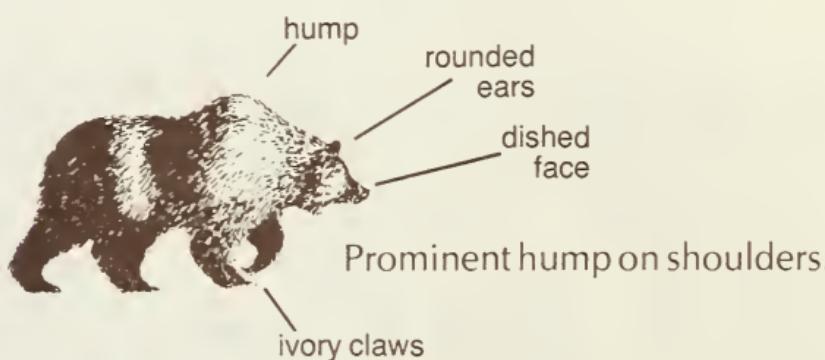
The Grizzly Bear (*ursus horribilis*)

Grizzly bears are occasionally seen in the North Cascade Mountain Range and in the Selkirk Mountains in northeastern Washington. Their range also extends through northern Idaho and northwestern Montana.



The grizzly is much larger than most black bears. The average grizzly weighs from 450 to 600 pounds with large male bears weighing up to 1,000 pounds. They stand over four feet tall at their hump. On their hind legs, some grizzlies are over nine feet tall. The highest point of a grizzly's back is its hump. This mass of muscle over its shoulders is an indication of its great strength.

The long, straight claws of the grizzly are used mostly for digging and are no help in climbing trees. Nevertheless, some adult grizzlies have been able to climb over 20 feet with the help of some well placed branches.



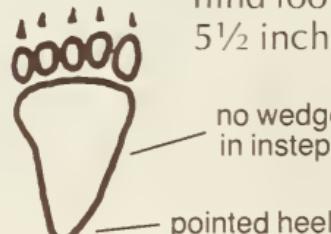
Front Foot



Front claws are straight, up to $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and extend well in front of the toes.

The front foot is $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches long and $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. The hind foot is 10 inches long and $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide.

Hind Foot



The grizzly's face is usually concave or "dished" and appears round, not pointed. Its body color is extremely variable, ranging from blond to very dark brown, often displaying a pattern of several shades. Many grizzlies are called "silvertips" because of a shining effect produced by white-tipped guard hairs in their coats.



Grizzlies are deceptively fast, able to do the "50 yard dash" in under three seconds. They are excellent swimmers and often play in streams and ponds. They can easily swim across lakes and rivers.

In 1975, the grizzly bear was designated a "Threatened Species" in the lower 48 states by the Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This designation recognizes that the grizzly is not yet in danger of extinction, but could become so if their numbers continue to decline.

The Black Bear (*ursus americanus*)

Black bears are the smallest North American bears. They may be found throughout the forested areas of Washington and Oregon.

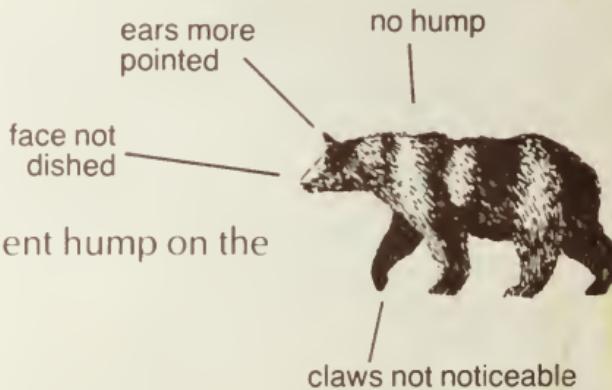


An adult black bear is much smaller than an adult grizzly. They generally weigh between 200 to 300 pounds and stand about three feet tall at the shoulder. Standing on its hind legs, an adult black bear is about five feet tall. The highest point of a black bear is the middle of its back. Although it has no prominent hump like a grizzly, some individual bears may have a slight hump that becomes more pronounced when its head is down.

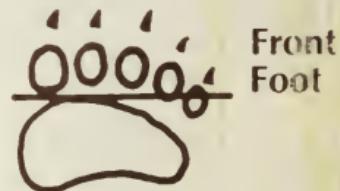
Unlike the grizzlies, black bears are good tree climbers. Their short claws give them the ability to climb most trees as well as dig for food.

A black bear's muzzle is straight and somewhat pointed. Its ears are small, round and erect. Black bears cannot be identified solely by color as they range from blond to black. An occasional white blaze may be found on the chest of the black bear.

Like the grizzly, black bears are fast. An adult black bear can run 50 yards in under four seconds. They are excellent swimmers and are often found around streams and rivers.



Their front claws are up to $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches long and are strongly curved. The claws are not extended in front of the toes.



The front foot is $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches long and $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide. The hind foot is 7 inches long and $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide.



**For further information,
contact the Forest Service
office nearest you.**